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Nixon's Peking Talks Jolted

STATINTL

The CIA has reported to President Nixon in Peking that, as we withdraw our troops, the Red forces are moving over Southeast Asia like termites on a log. The current alarm concerns Cambodia, Thailand and Burma, all three.

Cambodia is only the size of Oklahoma but it has 6.7 million people. The President's Vietnam pull-out was threatened by 30,000 North Vietnamese in Cambodia. Our incursion into Cambodia was a spoiling action covering our rear guard in Vietnam. But since then the keystone of the Nixon policy — Vietnamization — was tested by the Vietnamese Army's protectionary assault into Cambodia. And, as a demonstration to support the hope of Vietnamization, it was tragically unpromising.

The CIA advised the President that the disintegration heightens. The Cambodian Army has only 35,000 men. Phnom Penh, the capital is cut off, of course, except for a single uncertain road, but the Reds have now finished fortifying even fabulous Angkor Wat and completely control strategic Tonle Sap, the great lake of Cambodia. Premier Lon Nol is pressed toward a cease-fire.

THAILAND BORDERS on Cambodia; it stands between Cambodia, Laos and Burma.

The Siamese (34.7 million people) call their country Muang Thai, meaning Land of the Free People.

It has always been fiercely independent. In fact, Thailand is the only nation in the entire area that never has been ruled by a foreign power.

But the CIA has notified Mr. Nixon that Thai Army Commanding Gen. Prapas Charusathien reports that his units have intercepted Red Chinese and North Vietnamese soldiers crossing into Thailand's Sisaket and Surin provinces, 250 miles northeast of Bangkok. General Charusathien has only a 141,500-man force to meet this expansion.

U. S. AMBASSADOR TO CAMBODIA Emory C. Swank, in turn, apprised of this, is urging General Charusathien to add an army of ethnic Cambodians to meet Mao Tse-tung and Chou en-lai's expansion.

Burma, about the size of Texas, has a long common border with Thailand on Burma's

Shan states. But Burma (27 million people), fabled in Kipling's verses, is as different from Thailand as day and night. The home country of vacillating, mercurial former United Nations Secretary General U Thant, Burma is one of Southeast Asia's most inaccessible and mysterious countries.

Its actual name is the Pyee-Daung-Su Myanma Nainggan-Daw Union of Burma. The country is utterly provincial, totally fatalistic and unalterable Burmese. Neutralism, which likewise mesmerizes U Thant, is a fixation and isolationism a creed.

BURMA CHIEF OF STATE Gen. Ne Win, 60, his lidded eyes as rich as jade in a face as pale as bread and a man as wily and suspicious, as U Thant himself, once told me in Mandalay, "Only Buddha can help anyone." And, not surprisingly, Burma's Marxist economy approaches absolute thrombosis.

Burma has a wild, mountainous 1,200-mile frontier — a third as long as our Canadian border — with Red China. Its armed forces total 137,500 men — 6,500 of them in a completely meaningless Air Force.

The CIA reported to President Nixon in Peking that 20,000 China-armed insurgents are now battling these forces. They are in a major engagement near Lashio, close to Red China's border. And, reported the CIA, 3,000 North Vietnamese are heading into Burma Shan state.

Ne Win incessantly travels abroad — always flamboyantly — plays golf and hobnobs with world dignitaries whenever possible and prefers the city of Mandalay where "the dawn comes up like thunder" to his capital of Rangoon. And until now Red China has adopted a restrained role toward Burma. The CIA opinion is that Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai felt that they can wait until Ne Win dies or is booted out, as he booted out predecessor U Nu, and then Red China will be sucked into Burma as in a vacuum.

The CIA message to the President changes this. Unrevealed, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma alike suddenly jolt Mr. Nixon's Peking talks and further complicate his success over there.